The Love that Remains
May 1–July 27, 2024
Works by
Par Nair, Julie Gladstone, Carol Ann Apilado

Curated by
Samantha Lance

Location
University of Toronto Art Centre

This exhibition is produced as part of the requirements for the MVS degree in Curatorial Studies at the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, University of Toronto.

2024 MVS Curatorial Studies Graduating Exhibitions

Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances
Curated by Dallas Fellini
May 1–July 27, 2024
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Liberation in Four Movements
Curated by Ingrid Jones
May 1–July 27, 2024
University of Toronto Art Centre
The Love that Remains brings together three Toronto-based artists whose contemporary textile practices recover matrilineal histories of displacement and belonging. Par Nair, Julie Gladstone, and Carol Ann Apilado revitalize ancestral practices to reconnect with their families, genealogies, and homelands. They seek to reconcile with the loss, trauma, and grief tied to their histories in the South Indian, Sephardic, and Filipino diasporic communities respectively. The artists’ acts of weaving, embroidery, and knitting evoke how fabric has served as a material for survival, protection, and resilience. They bring attention to the female labour and creative expressions of their ancestors who endured displacement and/or exile across generations and in different geographical contexts.

The artists’ works invite us to develop a deeper understanding of the role and history of women’s cultural work as weavers, embroiderers, and knitters.

Par Nair is an artist and researcher of South Indian descent who explores memory, embodiment, and ritual through hand-embroidering her mother’s silk sarees. She sees this practice as “talking to her ancestors” as she stitches words of affection, vulnerability, and melancholia into the soft and brightly coloured fabrics worn by past generations of women in her family. Despite being separated by time and distance, Nair reaches out to her mother and late grandmother in three embroidered sarees as part of her Letters of Haunting series (2022–23). She seeks to understand the stories, traumas, and intergenerational knowledge passed down through inherited clothing. While touching these garments repeatedly with needle and thread, she reflects on her own hybrid identity and the unspoken stories of her late grandmother who survived the Partition of India. As the scent of jasmine fills the air and surrounds the sarees, Nair’s memories of India and her ancestors come alive in the exhibition space.

Julie Gladstone creates spiritual couture, fabric works, and digital videos inspired by Jewish mystical teachings, lullabies, and ceremonial textiles practiced by her matrilineal ancestors. Gladstone’s three artworks in The Love that Remains are part of a body of work that she produced after visiting the medieval village of Béjar, Spain, to which her Sephardic ancestors were expelled by the Spanish Inquisition 500 years ago. In Gladstone’s sculptural garment Ancestral Dress (2023), secret pockets are filled with natural spices and dried herbs that Sephardic mothers would have used to help protect their new homes and families from harmful spirits. In Nomadic Cemetery (2019), an embroidered pillowcase containing dirt from a former Jewish burial site in Béjar is paired with arranged lake stones from Toronto, acting as a resting place for her displaced ancestors. In addition, she digitally stitches together photographs of embroidered lace patterns created by her great-grandmother with a soundscape inspired by ancient Ladino lullabies in Portal into Dreamspace (2022). Gladstone seeks to heal intergenerational trauma by sewing the histories, rituals, and stories of her Sephardic matrilineal ancestors into her own fabric works.

Carol Ann Apilado is a self-taught weaver who creates handwoven fabrics and installations to reconnect with the textile practices of her Filipino ancestors. After discovering that she belongs to a lineage of Ilokano weavers from Bangar, La Union, in the Philippines, Apilado decided to teach herself how to use the floor loom and learn the techniques tied to this ancient art form. From her research and encounters with family heirloom blankets, she learned that many Ilokano women may have been mandated to weave by Spanish colonizers. Their textile practices would continue to be impacted by American colonizers decades after the country regained independence. With this in mind, Apilado seeks to emphasize the value of this skill, pursuing it as an important element in her own work and teaching it to others. This “labour of love,” an act of remembering, is brought together with Ilokano symbolism and spirituality in the handwoven installation Channel (2023). Apilado draws inspiration from kusikus, a psychedelic pattern from the Ilocos region in the Northern Philippines, dating back to the 1400s. It was believed that this sacred geometry stitched into blankets and sails would provide protection for travellers while they slept in their homes and journeyed across the sea. By incorporating this design and the belief systems of the Ilokano people into her own weaving, Apilado gains a deeper understanding of how her family lineage, cultural heritage, and artistic practice are interconnected.

Through their intricate textile practices, the artists in The Love that Remains enter into collaboration and conversation with their ancestors through tactile, sensorial encounters. Textile can function as a holder of memory, an enduring thread between mothers and daughters across lifetimes. The artists incorporate ancestral techniques, cultural symbolism, and family heirlooms into their artworks as a homage to their family lineage, cultural heritage, and artistic practice are interconnected.

This exhibition is dedicated to my mother, grandmothers, and matrilineal ancestors.
About the Curator

Samantha Lance is a curator and writer originally from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and currently based in Toronto. She holds a BFA with Distinction in Criticism and Curatorial Practice from OCAD University and is completing the MVS Curatorial Studies program at the University of Toronto. Samantha has worked as a freelance writer and Curatorial Intern for The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery and a Curatorial Assistant and Registrar for the Art Gallery of Algoma, and she has volunteered as a Gallery Guide for the Art Gallery of Ontario. She is a recipient of the John and Myrna Daniels Foundation Opportunity Award. (samanthalance.format.com)

Curator’s Acknowledgments

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Institutional Acknowledgment

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Public Programs

Curatorial Tour with Samantha Lance
Saturday, May 11, 2pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

Threading Through Time: In Conversation with Par Nair, Julie Gladstone, and Carol Ann Apilado
Saturday, May 25, 2pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

All programs are free and open to the public. For more information and to register, visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs.

Exhibition Tours

The Art Museum offers in-person guided exhibition tours for classes and groups. For more information or to book a tour, email artmuseum@utoronto.ca.

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